

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 01284 01 OF 02 290822Z

11

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

USIA-15 SAM-01 IO-14 DRC-01 EUR-25 /132 W

----- 084316

R 281043Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 925

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 1284

DEPT PASS TO ABU DHABI, ALGIERS, AMMAN, BEIRUT, BONN,
CAIRO, KUWAIT, LONDON, MANAMA, PARIS, ROME, RABAT,
TEL AVIV, TUNIS, USUN AND JIDDA

E.O. 11652 GDS

TAGS: PFOR SY US

SUBJECT: ATMOSPHERICS SINCE PRESIDENT'S VISIT

REF: JIDDA 3579(NOTAL)

1. SUMMARY: IN THE TWO WEEKS SINCE PRESIDENT NIXON
VISITED DAMASCUS ALL PERSONS WE HAVE SPOKEN TO CONTINUE
TO BELIEVE THAT THIS EVENT MARKS A MAJOR TURNING POINT
IN THE HISTORY OF SYRIANAMERICAN RELATIONS. ALTHOUGH
OFFICIAL CIRCLES ARE FOLLOWING CLOSELY THE SITUATION IN
LEBANON, THE GENERAL PUBLIC APPEARS TO BE MORE INTERESTED
IN THE POSSIBILITY OF RENEWED AMERICAN INVESTMENT IN AND
ASSISTANCE TO SYRIA FOLLOWING THE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS.
MEANWHILE THE BIG LOCAL NEWS HAS BEEN THE RECOVERY OF
QUNEITRA WHERE "WANTON AND SPITEFUL DESTRUCTION" BY THE
ISRAELIS HAS CAUSED BITTERNESS AND THEREBY MAY HAVE LOST
A GOOD OPPORTUNITY FOR THE ISRAELIS TO SHOW THE SYRIANS THAT
DISENGAGEMENT COULD BE THE BEGINNING OF SOMETHING BETTER
IN ISRAELI-SYRIAN RELATIONS. DESPITE REPORT OF OPPOSITION
WITHIN BAATH PARTY TO THE CURRENT SYRIAN POLICY THAT
RAPPROCHEMENT WITH THE US ALL INDICATIONS ARE THAT
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 01284 01 OF 02 290822Z

ASAD IS FULLY IN CONTROL. FINALLY

THERE IS NO DOUBT THAT EXPECTATIONS ARE HIGH IN SYRIAN FLOWING FROM THE BUDDING US-SYRIAN RELATIONSHIP BUT WE AGREE WITH OUR COLLEAGUES IN JIDDA THAT DISAPPOINTMENT WILL BE DEEP INDEED SHOULD THIS NEW RELATIONSHIP NOT BEAR FRUIT
END SUMMARY.

2. TWO WEEKS HAVE PASSED SINCE PRESIDENT NIXON MADE HIS HISTORIC VISIT TO DAMASCUS. IN THAT TIME WE HAVE BEEN ENDEAVORING THROUGH A VARIETY OF CONTACTS TO ASCERTAIN WHAT THE MORE LASTING REACTION HAS BEEN TO THIS VISIT FOLLOWING THE INITIAL OUTFLOW OF ENTHUSIASM AND EUPHORIA IN THE CITY. ALL OF OUR CONTACTS (OFFICIAL/NON-OFFICIAL DIPLOMATIC AND JOURNALISTIC) AGREE THAT PRESIDENT NIXON'S VISIT TO THE MIDDLE EAST MARKS A MAJOR TURNING POINT IN THE HISTORY OF UNITED STATES RELATIONS WITH BOTH SYRIA AND THE ARAB WORLD. AS ONE SYRIAN DIPLOMAT TOLD ME, "THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT PUT THE PRESIDENTIAL SEAL ON SECRETARY KISSINGER'S DISENGAGEMENT AGREEMENTS AND THEREBY SIGNIFIED TO EVERYONE IN THE REGION AS WELL AS TO THE WORLD THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS FINALLY REALIZED THE EXTENT OF ITS INTERESTS HERE AND THE NEED TO PROTECT THEM.

3. AS FAR AS THE AVERAGE DAMASCENE IS CONCERNED THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT IS LOOKED UPON AS "A NEW DAWN TO USE THE WORDS OF ONE SYRIAN BUSINESSMAN. ALREADY THERE ARE REPORTS IN THE CITY INDICATING THAT THE UNITED STATES BOTH AS A BUSINESS COMMUNITY AND AS A GOVERNMENT NOW INTENDS TO INVEST IN AND TO HELP SYRIA IN A MAJOR WAY. EVERYWHERE WE HAVE GONE OVER THE LAST SEVERAL WEEKS WE HAVE BEEN RECEIVING CONGRATULATIONS FOR BOTH THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT AND THE RESUMPTION OF RELATIONS. AFTER THIS HOWEVER THE FIRST QUESTION ASKED IS "WHEN ARE THE REST OF YOUR COUNTRYMEN GOING TO ARRIVE? THIS QUESTION IS QUICKLY FOLLOWED BY A SECOND QUESTION, "WHAT ARE THE AMERICANS GOING TO DO HERE".

4. THE ARMY IS ALSO REPORTED TO BE GENERALLY PLEASED WITH THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT AND THERE IS SOME TALK THAT SYRIA MAY NOW START SENDING SELECTED OFFICERS TO THE UNITED STATES AS PART OF THE REESTABLISHMENT OF THE CULTURAL
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 01284 01 OF 02 290822Z

EXCHANGE PROGRAM. MEANWHILE AS DISENGAGEMENT COMES TO A CLOSE THERE ARE ALSO INCREASED REPORTS THAT THE ARMY WILL NOW BEGIN TO REDUCE ITS STRENGTH

5. ON THE OFFICIAL SIDE, REACTIONS ARE SOMEWHAT MORE MUTED BUT NOT MUCH MORE. FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR GENUINE SATISFACTION WITH THE PRESIDENT'S VISIT PARTICULARLY THE PRESENT AFTER DINNER REMARKS

AND ESPECIALLY THOSE IN WHICH HE STATED HIS "UNDERSTANDING" OF THE SYRIAN CONCERN ABOUT THE PALESTINIAN QUESTION AND IN WHICH HE EMPHASIZED AMERICAN COMMITMENT TO A JUST AND DURABLE MIDDLE EAST PEACE. SOME FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS HOWEVER, ARE CONCERNED THAT THESE POSITIVE AND MUCH WELCOMES PRESIDENTIAL WORDS MAY HAVE BEEN SOMEWHAT VITIATED BY SUBSEQUENT STATEMENTS UTTERED IN JERUSALEM. AT THE SAME TIME HOWEVER THIS REACTION HAS BEEN BALANCED BY A SOPHISTICATED AWARENESS OF THE DIFFICULTY OF THE UNITED STATES ROLE AT THIS TIME TRYING AS ONE FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIALS PUT IT "TO CARRY ENOUGH WATER TO SATISFY TWO THIRSTY MEN".

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEE.

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 01284 02 OF 02 290857Z

11

ACTION NEA-16

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-07 H-03 INR-10 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-07 PA-04 RSC-01 PRS-01 SP-03 SS-20

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R 281043Z JUN 74

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 926

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 1284

DEPT PASS TO ABU DHABI, ALGIERS, AMMAN, BEIRUT, BONN, CAIRO, KUWAIT, LONDON, MANAMA, PARIS, ROME, RABAT, TEL AVIV, TUNIS, USUN AND JIDDA

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6. THESE SAME OFFICIALS HAVE ALSO EXPRESSED CONCERN OVER THE LAST FEW DAYS THAT THE ISRAELI-LEBANESE SITUATION MAY HAVE AN ADVERSE EFFECT ON WHAT HAS BEEN ACHIEVED BY THE

UNITED STATES IN THE ARE AND PARTICULARLY IN SYRIA.
ANOTHER HIGH RANKING FOREIGN OFFICIAL TOLD ME MORE
IN SORROW THAN IN ANGER THAT SYRIAN WOULD FIND IT VERY
DIFFICULT, INDEED, TO STAND BY IF ISRAEL CONTINUED TO
"DESTROY" SOUTHERN LEBANON. HE SAID HE HOPED THE UNITED
STATES REALIZED "THE FRAGILITY" OF ITS RECENT EFFORTS
AND WOULD NOT LET THE SITUATION IN LEBANON GET OUT
OF HAND. IN THIS REGARD WE HAVE NOT HEARD AMOUNT THE GENERAL
POPULATION THE CHARGE LEVELLED THAT THE UNITED STATES HAS
GIVEN THE GREEN LIGHT TO ISRAEL TO GO AFTER THE FEDAYEEN
BUT AT LEAST ONE FOREIGN OFFICE OFFICIAL AGAIN MORE IN
CONCERN THAT WITH IRE WONDERED IF "INADVERTENTLY" THE
UNITED STATES MAY NOT HAVE GIVEN ISRAEL A FREE HAND.
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PAGE 02 DAMASC 01284 02 OF 02 290857Z

7. THE GENERAL IMPRESSION I HAVE RECEIVED IS THAT WHILE
THERE IS LITTLE CONCERN ABOUT THE LEBANESE SITUATION AMONG
THE DAMASCENE CITIZENRY, THE GOVERNMENT IS OBVIOUSLY FOLLOWING
THE SITUATION CLOSELY NOT ALLOWING ITSELF TO BE RUSHED
INTO ANY PRECIPITIOUS ACTION. THUS FAR THE LOCAL MEDIA
HAVE GIVEN BANNERLINE COVERAGE TO VARIOUS STATEMENTS
BY PRESIDENT ASAD MADE TO VISITING LEBANESE DIGNITARIES
THAT SYRIAN WOULD NOT "STAND WITH FOLDED HANDS" IN THE FACE
OF CONTINUED ISRAELI AGGRESSION AGAINST LEBANON. ACTUAL
EVENTS IN LEBANON HOWEVER HAVE GIVEN RELATIVELY
LOW PROFILE TREATMENT WITH NO ATTEMPT TO ENFLAME PUBLIC
FEELING. THE LOCAL TELEVISION FOR EXAMPLE HAS ONLY SHOWN
PICTURES OF DESTRUCTION IN LEBANON ONCE OVER THE LAST
TWO WEEKS

8. THE BIG NEWS IN SYRIA DURING THIS PERIOD FOLLOWING
THE PRESIDENTIAL VISIT HAS BEEN THE RECOVERY OF SYRIAN
TERRITORY CULMINATING IN THE RETURN OF QUNEITRA TO SYRIAN
CONTROL AFTER SEVEN YEARS. ON JUNE 26 PRESIDENT ASAD
HIMSELF VISITED THE TOWN AND RAISED THE SYRIAN FLAG OVER
QUNEITRA TO THE CHEERS AND DANCING OF THE HIGH CROWN WHICH
HAD BEEN ALLOWED TO ENTER FOR THE OCCASION. MUCH
HAS BEEN MADE IN THE LOCAL MEDIA OF THE "WANTON" ISRAELI
DESTRUCTION OF THE CITY WITH PROMISES THAT THE CITY WILL
BE REBUILT IN A BETTER AND MORE MODERN FASHION. IN THIS
REGARD, IT WOULD APPEAR THAT THE ISRAELIS LOST AN
MODICUM OF TRUST WITH THE SYRIANS BY WHAT THE SYRIANS
BELIEVE TO HAVE BEEN THE "SPITEFUL" ISRAELI DESTRUCTION AND
LOOKING OF THE CITY UP TO "THE LAST MINUTE" FINALLY
THERE ARE ALREADY RUMORS IN TOWN THAT THE UNITED
STATE GOVERNMENT WILL BE ASSOCIATED IN THE EFFORT OF
RECONSTRUCTION.

9. ANOTHER EVENT WHICH HAS OCCUREED AND WHICH WOULD APPRET
TO BE IMPORTANT HAS BEEN THE "FIFTH EXTRAORDINARY REEIIIONAL
BATTH PARTY CONFERENCE" WHICH COMPLETED IT SESSIONS ON
JUNE 22 AND WHICH PUBLICLY GAVE FULL SUPPORT TO PRESIDENT
ASAD FOR HIS DISENGAGEMENT EFFORTS. THERE ARE STRONG RUMORS
IN TOWN HOWEVER THAT THIS STRONG SUPPORT WAS ACHIEVED
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PAGE 03 DAMASC 01284 02 OF 02 290857Z

ONLY AFTER MUCH DISSENSION WITHIN THE PARTY FOLLOWED BY
ARREST OF SOME OF THE STRONGEST OPPONENTS. A HIGH RANKING
FOREIGN MINISTRY OFFICIAL CONFIRMED TO ME THAT THERE WAS
STRONG OPPOSITION IN THE PARTY BUT ADDED THAT THE REGIME
IS IN CONTROL OF THE SITUATION. HE CONTINUED THAT NONE
THELESS THE REGIME WILL PROCEED CAUTIONSLY IN ITS
RELATIONS WITH THE UHNITED STATES LEST IT BE ACCUSED OF
SELLING OUT BY THE EXREMISTS IN THE PARTY AND BY OTHER
IN SYRIA AND IN THE AREA WHO OPPOSE A UNITED STATES
SYRIAN REPPROCHMENT. THE SAME OFFICIAL NOTED HOWEVER
THAT THE BATTH PARTY IN SYRIA IS A "SHADOW" OF IT FORMER
SELF AND THAT THE REGIME HAS NOTHING TO FEAR FROM IT BUT
THAT ASAD CONTINES TO NEED THE BAATH LABEL TO GIVE HIS
REIME LEGITIMACY IN THE EYES OF THE SYRIAN PEPLA AND
OF THE ARAB WORLD.

10. IN CONCLUSION IT IS STILL DIFFICULT FOR US AT THE
EMBASSY TO BELIEVE THAT AS WE WILL BE WELCOMING OUR GUESTS
TO THE JULY FOURTH RECEPTION WILL BE EXACTLY SIX
MONTHS FROM OUR ARRIVAL IN DAMASCUS ON JANUARY 3. (JUST
AS PRESIDENT NIXON'S VISIT WAS EXACTLY SIX MONTHS TO THE
DAY FROM SECRETARY KISSINGER'S FIRST VISIT TO
DAMACUS ON DECEMBER 15) THIS HAS BEEN A TRULY MOMENTOUS
HALF YEAR IN THE HISTORY NOT ONLY OF OUR RELATIONS WITH
SYRIAN BUT OF OUR RELATIONS WITH THE REGION. THAT HOPES
AND EXPECTATIONS HAVE BEEN RAISED CANNOT BE GAINSAYED. THE
MODERATE ARABS (HERE I INCLUDE PRESIDENT ASAD) HAVE ONCE
AGAIN PUT THEIR TRUST IN THE UNITED STATES AND IN ITS
GOVERNMENT. WHILE I DO NOT THINK THEY EXPECT TOTAL
IDENTITY OF VIEWS IN RETURN FOR THIS TRUST THEY
DO EXPECT WHAT WE HAVE PROMISED THEM, A FAIR HEARING AND
AN EVENHANDED POLICY. DOUBTLESS THE FUTURE AHEAD WILL BE
DIFFICULT BUT A GOOD FOUNDATIONS HAS NOT BEEN LAID. AT
THE SAME TIME HOWEVER I MUST AGREE WITH MY COLLEAGUES
IN JIDDA (REFTEL) WHAT WHILE WE STAND TO GAIN MUCH IN THE
MIDDLE EAST WE ALSO STAND TO LOSE EVEN MORE IF WE DO NOT
FOLLOW THROUGH FROM THIS GOOD BEGINNING.
SCOTES

NOTE BY OC/T: NOT PASSED ABOVE ADDRESSEE.
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PAGE 04 DAMASC 01284 02 OF 02 290857Z

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